

## The Ill-Timed Cure

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Summary: Ryoga is freed from his curse at the worst possible moment... now who could have done a thing like that? And what's to be done about it?

## The Ill-Timed Cure

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><br>The Ill-Timed Cure: a Ranma 1/2 fanfiction

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><br> This past Sunday morning, Ryoga woke up in bed with Akane.  
Naked.

><br> Actually, this is a rather common occurrence, not that I like  
it

>any more for that fact. If anything, it just bugs me that much more  
<br>that Akane's sleeping with that dope. She, of course, has no clue

>\*why\* it bothers me so; but then, she had no idea it was Ryoga,  
<br>after all, and I was bound by my warrior's oath not to reveal his

>weakness to anyone. To her, it was just her pet P-chan. Cute as  
<br>a teddy bear, in her eyes, and about as harmless.

> Until now.<br> And naturally, he blamed me for it.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> There's no school on Sundays, so Akane usually takes the  
opportunity

>to sleep in. That's her prerogative, I suppose, but that lazy  
<br>tomboy's never gonna become a great martial artist if she's gonna

>lounge around in bed until 9 a.m. every chance she gets. And  
it's<br>not like the 'beauty sleep' argument works: ya gotta \*have\*  
beauty

>first for beauty sleep to do any good.<br> Anyway, I was up at 6 or  
so, doing my tai-chi and a few other

>exercises. Once I finished with that, I headed over to Ucchan's  
<br>for breakfast (Kasumi sleeps in occasionally on Sundays, too).

>Spent the better part of an hour and a half chowing down and  
<br>chatting with Ukyou; the usual stuff. Got to the part about our  
>futures, and how I'd end up teaching martial arts, and I realized  
<br>that I'd stayed too long. I was helping Mr. Tendo with a Sunday  
>morning kids class at 8:30, and I'd have to run to make it.  
<br>Ucchan gave me a quick kiss on the cheek (I wish she wouldn't  
>do that. Bad enough Shampoo glomps onto me whenever she gets <br>a  
chance. Thank heavens the place was empty at the time. If  
>Akane'd find out...), and I scrambled outta there and sped back  
<br>to the dojo.  
><br> And that's when Ryoga tried to kill me. Again  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*  
><br> He made his usual entrance, which is to say he was yelling at  
>me even from blocks away.<br> "RANMA SAOTOME! You have humiliated me  
for the last time!!  
>PREPARE TO DIE!!" And then he makes his patented leap, with the  
<br>umbrella pointed down at me like a spear. Well, I wasn't prepared  
>to die, but I \*was\* prepared to dodge. I jumped onto a light pole,  
<br>and when Ryoga landed, I bounced onto his head, and down to the  
>ground. And there he lay, flat on his back, in the middle of one  
<br>of his trademark craters. The jerk's gonna make Nerima look like  
>the moon someday if he keeps this up. Come to think of it, though,  
<br>he seemed pretty banged-up already. I was pretty sure I couldn't  
>have done that just from stepping on his head. Well, anyway...<br> I  
didn't really have time for this, so I just kept on running.  
>Then I realized that he had gotten up (so soon?) and was in hot  
<br>pursuit. Just great. Okay, buster... and I sped down a zigzag  
>maze of alleys until I was satisfied that I'd lost him (of course,  
<br>this is Ryoga, so it didn't take long). Then I sauntered back to  
>the dojo, and joined the class that had just started.<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> "You're late, Ranma-kun."<br> "Gomen nasai, Tendo-sensei. Went out  
for breakfast..." I noticed  
>him twitch at that. Oops. "...and I was, erm, accosted, on the way  
<br>back."  
> "Nn. Well, never mind that. It's time for class..." and he turned  
<br>to face the children, indicating I should do likewise. We bowed  
to  
>them together.<br> "Ohayo gozaimasu, class." The kids responded in  
unison.  
> "Ohayo gozaimasu, Tendo-sensei, Saotome-sensei." I picked up my  
<br>clipboard to take roll, while Mr. Tendo busied himself gathering  
>equipment.<br> "Chibiko-chan?" "Hai!"  
> "Yoichi-kun?" "Hai!"<br> "Hiroe-chan?" "Hai!"  
> "Kimaie-chan?" "Hai!"<br> "Eichiro-kun?" "Hai!"  
> "Masanori-kun?" "Hai!" I'd come to the end of my list, and I saw  
<br>out of the corner of my eye that there was still one more person

I  
>hadn't counted.<br> "Uhm... and you are?" I asked, pen poised to scribble in the name.  
>A semi-falsetto voice answered me.<br> "Hibiki Ryoga..." I was just about to write it down, somewhat absent-  
>mindedly -- how could it possibly be him? I'd lost him just a few  
<br>minutes ago in the streets of Nerima -- when it dropped to his normal  
>pitch, with a touch of menace in it "...sensei." I looked up,  
<br>thoroughly surprised. Sure enough, there he was, with this  
\*angelic\*  
>grin on his face. It quickly transformed into a smirk as he chirped  
<br>out a falsetto "Hai!" like the others had.  
> How in the world...? He found this place before \*I\* had, even.  
<br>Then it hit me: when you're \*trying\* to lose him, it'll never work.  
>He'll always find you when you don't want him to. Damn. I'd  
<br>forgotten that.  
> What happened next, though, \*really\* took me by surprise.<br> There was a low rumble, like distant thunder, coming from the  
>equipment cabinet. I could dimly recognize what was coming, but  
<br>for the life of me, I hadn't the faintest clue what I had done this  
>time that was so wrong. Then the demonic face that was Mr. Tendo's  
<br>angry battle aura sprang from the cabinet toward ...Ryoga?  
> "RYO....GA!!! HOW \*DARE\* YOU MOLEST MY LITTLE GIRL!" He roared  
<br>over to Ryoga, and grabbed him by belt loop and collar. The next  
  
>thing anyone knew, he had taken him outside the dojo, tossed him  
<br>into the air, and punted him into orbit. I made note of the fact  
  
>that, as furious as Mr. Tendo was, he'd taken the trouble to open  
<br>the doors and go outside before inflicting injury. I suppose he  
  
>figured there was no sense wrecking the dojo when he knew he'd have  
<br>to fix it himself, but you have to admire the presence of mind  
  
>involved there.<br> At this point, I had to turn my attention to the kids, who were  
>all huddling around me, clutching my waist or knee, depending on  
<br>their height. They were all staring at me with eyes big as saucers,  
>as big as those kids you see in the manga books. Since his anger  
<br>wasn't directed at me (for a change), and he had dealt his vengeance  
>to Ryoga, I figured I was safe in attempting to calm him down.<br> "Uh, Tendo-sensei... the kids. Can we get back to them?" He spun  
  
>around, and instantly assumed a posture of acute embarrassment:  
right <br>hand up, rubbing the back of his neck. He could tell from looking at  
>his students that he'd scared the living tar out of them, and he was  
<br>thoroughly abashed about it.  
> "Uh...heh-heh. Sorry about that, children. Just a little...  
<br>personal business to attend to..." He briefly flashed me a look  
  
>that said "See me after class," and I hoped he'd give me some  
<br>explanation for his outburst before trying to thrash me for whatever  
>he seemed to think I'd done wrong this time.<br> As for the kids,

now that his rage had passed, and they were  
>reassured that it hadn't been directed at them, they swarmed around  
<br>Mr. Tendo like bees.  
> "Sugoi, Tendo-sensei! That was so cool! Can you teach us that  
<br>technique?" Amazing how quickly they forget their fears, really.

>Mr. Tendo once again assumed the 'modest' posture, and hemmed and  
<br>hawed a bit. I knew from experience that he wasn't exactly  
\*proud\*  
>of this so-called 'demon-head' technique, as he considered himself  
<br>to be out of control when he would execute it. No kidding. He'd

>apologized to me on several occasions after he'd using it -- on?  
<br>at? -- me for something I'd said (or refused to say) about his

>'little girl.' Whatever it was that caused never was deserving  
<br>of such a violent attack, and he would admit that afterwards.

>Anyway, he was in a bit of an awkward situation, with the kids  
<br>being so fascinated by it. Rather than let him explain it to  
them,  
>I figured I could take him off the hook.<br> "Now, kids... that sort  
of technique takes a great deal of  
>concentrated emotional energy." Somehow, I figured the word  
<br>'passion' just wouldn't register with them. Not when they're

>this young. "Anyway, you'd probably need to be at least second  
<br>or third dan to even \*attempt\* it. I'm sixth dan myself, and I've

>\*never\* been able to master it." Not that I'd even tried, or wanted  
<br>to. "In any case, you kids will have to get cracking if you're  
gonna  
>get your first black belts in the next couple of years. And speaking  
<br>of getting cracking, let's begin today's lesson: everybody get  
into  
>positions..."<br>  
> From there, the class went by rather uneventfully, aside from  
<br>the occasional injury. Some kids just insist on getting to the

>cinderblocks before they're ready to. And sometimes it takes the  
<br>kids a while to recover -- this isn't a cartoon, after all, this

>is real life. Otherwise, though, I coulda led this class in my  
<br>sleep.  
> And while I didn't actually \*sleep\* during class (I'll save that  
<br>for when I'm not moving, like in Ms. Hinomiya's English class or

>something), my mind did wander a bit. Maybe Mr. Tendo was going  
<br>to explain his little outburst to me afterwards. Usually, he and

>Ryoga get along reasonably well, although he's never taken kindly  
<br>to Ryoga's affection for Akane. Sometimes, I wish he would -- at

>least that would mean I'd get \*one\* fiancÃ©e off my back, and maybe  
<br>she'd quit beating on me.... Naah.  
> Wait a tic... what was it he'd said? "How dare you molest my  
<br>little girl?"  
> Molest? Ryoga? That sly fox! I'd never'a' thought he'd had it  
<br>in him to put the moves on...  
> ....on AKANE?<br> Why, that... pervert!

><br>\*\*\*\*\*  
><br> "Okay, kids. That's enough for one morning. Hiroe-chan, make  
  
>sure your mom changes that bandage every couple of days. Let it  
<br>air out a bit. Yoichi-kun, those were some excellent acrobatics,  
  
>but let's try not to get \*too\* carried away, there. Remember,  
<br>martial arts is about physical and mental \*control\* as much as  
  
>exertion. See you all next Sunday, and... yes, Eichiro-kun, <br>I'll  
try to be on time next time if you will. Smart aleck...."  
>I grinned. Once the kids had cleared out, I turned to Mr. Tendo.<br>  
"Alright, Mr. Tendo. Wouldja mind explaining what all that was  
  
>about before class?"<br> "Ranma... son. You've \*got\* to protect my  
little girl. You're  
>her fiancÃ©e, right?"<br> Well, I don't always like this fiancÃ©e  
business, but I can't deny  
>that we're engaged or nothin'. Heck, I've admitted it, publicly...  
<br>once or twice... under duress. "What's your point, Mr. Tendo?  
What  
>the heck happened? And where does Ryoga fit into this?" Mr. Tendo  
<br>began to tremble with rage as he replied:  
> "That... that... that PERVERT Ryoga was in bed with my little  
<br>Akane! YOUR Akane, Ranma! This morning!" I coulda told him that.  
  
>Actually... no, I couldn't. The warrior's code forbids me from  
<br>revealing an opponent's weakness.  
> "Was P-chan around anywhere at the time?" Yeah, I have to admit  
<br>I smirked at bit at this. Okay, so I'm forbidden to tell of  
Ryoga's  
>weak spot in so many words, but I never saw anything wrong with  
<br>dropping hints. Not that \*anyone\* ever seemed to figure it out.  
  
>Heck, if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Tendo's seen Ryoga transform and  
<br>for whatever reason never bothered to put two and two together.  
  
>Otherwise, He shouldn't've been surprised by whatever it was  
<br>happened this morning. To the best of my knowledge, the only  
  
>ones who knew, besides me and Ryoga, were Ucchan (and her  
warrior's<br>code was as strict as mine, if not more so) and Akari  
(and she \*liked\*  
>the fact that he turned into a pig, and wanted to keep this precious  
<br>little secret to herself as well). Anyway, this hint was no  
different.  
> "Wh-what does her pet PIG have to do with anything?!" he sputtered  
<br>at me. "Your friend --"  
> "He's NO friend of mine!" Now \*I\* was getting mad. But Mr. Tendo  
<br>ignored me completely  
> "-- was lying next to Akane, naked as the day he was born. WHAT  
<br>was he doing there?"  
> "Whaddya asking ME for?! How should I know? D'ya think I  
\*invited\*<br>him to sleep with her or somethin'?"  
> It's amazing sometimes, what Mr. Tendo hears and doesn't hear:  
<br>"You INVITED him to sleep with her?!" he gasped. "Get OUT!! GET  
  
>OUT OF MY HOUSE!!!" He was firing up that demon-head thing; I  
was<br>in no position to argue. I got out.  
> And went looking for Ryoga.<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> Stupid Mr. Tendo. Always over-reacting. And now, he'll tell  
his<br>side of the story to the girls, and they'll think I'm absolute  
scum,  
>that I'd actually \*ask\* Ryoga to sleep with Akane. Now why the  
hell<br>would I do that, anyway? Could they possibly be that dumb as  
to  
>believe that?<br> Akane might. She's got the Tendo temper in spades.  
And she's  
>probably mad enough to believe ANYthing bad about me. Just like  
<br>Ryoga...  
> Oh, yeah. I'm supposed to be looking for him. Right.<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> Well, I didn't find him. HE found ME. Grabbed me by the collar,  
<br>and yanked me into a nearby alley. You'd never have suspected him  
  
>to be the mugger type, huh? Well, it wasn't money he wanted. It  
<br>was the usual:  
> "Now, I can have my revenge on you for my humiliation!" Despite  
<br>his grip on my collar, I knew I was more than a match for him in  
a  
>fair fight, so I wasn't really worried. Just curious.<br> "\*What\*  
are ya blaming me for this time, P-chan? Global warming?"  
> "Don't call me P-chan!"<br> "Well, it's your own fault. Sooner or  
later, it was bound to happen,  
>even if by accident. You know, you take an awful risk every night,  
<br>when you spend it with Akane." Even as I was saying this, I  
realized  
>I was getting myself into more trouble with each word: it was  
starting<br>to sound like \*I\* was admitting to having splashed him.

> "So... you admit to it, do you?" Yeah, I called THAT one. Just  
<br>then, a splash of cold water hit us from above. Dammit, for once,  
  
>couldn't folks in Nerima be as polite as the Japanese are supposed  
<br>to be in the guide books, and at least shout some kind of  
warning?  
>Didn't faze Ryoga, though: "I'm gonna pulverize you once and for  
<br>all!" Then, it hit me.  
> "Ryoga, you big jerk. It couldn't have been me who splashed  
you."<br> "And WHY NOT?!"  
> "Okay... One: I was at Ucchan's this morning for breakfast.  
She'll<br>vouch for me. I don't think I was anywhere NEAR the dojo at  
the time.  
>Two: I've tried nailing you a couple times early on, remember? I  
<br>always gave you warning. And you \*always\* got me into trouble by  
  
>knocking me into Akane. Three: It's the warrior's code. It's  
not<br>right to reveal an enemy's weak spot like that. Four, and this  
  
>oughta convince you: Don't you think if I got my hands on the  
<br>Nanniichuan, I'd use it on MYSELF first?"  
><br> That last one stopped him in his tracks. "Hunh?!  
N-N-Nanniichuan?"  
> "Well, yeah. Look at me." He let go -- whew! Now I could  
breathe<br>again.  
> There I stood, busty as ever. "I mean, shouldn't you be a pig by  
<br>now? You're as wet as I am." He just stood there, looking at his

>hands in disbelief.<br> "You're right! I'm wet! And I'm STILL HUMAN!  
I'M CURED!! I'M  
>CURED!!" He started dancing around me. Eventually, he grabbed my  
<br>hands, and spun both of us around and around, all the while  
yelling  
>"I'M CURED!! I'M CURED!!" I tried to get him to let go, as we  
were<br>starting to spin rather fast. I finally had to bite his hand,  
at  
>which point he let go with a yelp of pain and surprise. The  
force<br>of his spinning was such that I wound up flung amongst a  
pile of  
>garbage cans. Maybe that wasn't such a good idea, after all.<br> My  
teeth had left no impression on Ryoga's celebratory mood.  
>"I'M CURED!! I can finally tell Akane how I feel about her  
without<br>worrying about my curse!"  
> "Ohhh, no you can't." I snapped, still rubbing my head. He  
<br>stopped short. So abruptly, in fact, that his momentum nearly  
  
>knocked him over.<br> "Wh-whaddya mean, I can't?"  
> "Did you already forget why yer so damn mad at me in the  
first<br>place? You got caught in Akane's bed this morning... and you  
weren't  
>a pig... and you weren't dressed. I don't think you're getting  
<br>anywhere \*near\* Akane for a \*long\* time to come."  
><br> I had to feel sorry for him. Just when he's the happiest he's  
  
>been, probably, in his whole life, here I go and bust his  
bubble.<br>And now, he's as sad as I've ever seen him. Come to that,  
maybe I  
>oughta start inching away. Any moment now, he could materialize a  
<br>Shichi Hokodan chi-ball, and I'd just as soon be outta the area  
  
>should that happen.<br> But nothing did happen. He just slumped  
against a wall and started  
>crying. Dammit. I can't deal with it when Akane does this, or  
Ukyou,<br>or Shampoo, or Kodachi, or... or Ryoga.  
> "Aw, Ryoga. Snap out of it. Tell ya what, you and me, we'll hunt  
<br>down the jerk who did this to ya."  
> "sniff You will?"<br> I couldn't help grinning.  
> "Sure. You don't think I'm gonna let you be the only one who gets  
<br>cured, do ya?"  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*part 2  
><br> When dusk started to fall, I walked him back to the dojo, so he  
  
>wouldn't get lost. On the way, I told him how Mr. Tendo had thrown  
<br>\*me\* out as well. We both had a good laugh at his overreaction.  
  
> "You gotta be kidding! He thought you \*asked\* me to sleep with  
<br>her? Oh, man.." He practically doubled over. "What was that  
  
>idiot THINKING?"<br> "I have \*no\* flippin' idea. Maybe he thought I  
wanted you to  
>break her in or somethin'"<br> "No \*way\*!"  
> "Well, you got any other guesses?"<br> Suddenly, Ryoga stopped  
laughing.  
> "But that means he's not gonna let you in, either! And I'm  
<br>\*definitely\* not allowed to drop in, you know."  
> "Relax. I imagine Kasumi will have talked some sense into him  
<br>by now. Besides, it's either let me back in, or throw out his old

>pal Saotome. Much as I think he'd be better off if he did -- I just  
<br>wish for once, we'd get into a situation where Pop would suffer  
as  
>much as I usually end up doing -- he's not likely to do that.  
<br>Besides, he'll rather \*I\* defend Akane's honor against you than  
  
>have to do it himself.<br> "As for you, well... maybe you should  
camp out in the dojo. I  
>imagine \*nobody's\* gonna want you in the house until this is all  
<br>sorted out. Even \*I\* haven't \_ever\_ been too keen on your  
sleeping  
>with Akane â€" and would you wipe that stupid grin off your face? --  
<br>but what could I do to stop her, huh? But there's a couple back  
  
>rooms in the building; you can stay there, and as long as you don't  
<br>come out too often, you should be pretty safe."  
> "B-but \*why\* are you trying to smuggle me into the dojo?"<br> I  
sighed.  
> "Look, I wasn't kidding about the cure. I don't care what Nabiki  
<br>says about it being cool or nothin'. I hate being a girl -- even  
  
>a kawaii girl -- half my life. Yeah, I know... I s'pose I got off  
<br>easy, compared to you and Mousse. And Shampoo -- brrr! But it's  
  
>still no picnic. Whoever did this to you has the Nanniichuan water  
<br>on `em, and I intend t'find it. At which point, you're entitled  
to  
>do as you wish to whoever it is.<br> "Anyway, I can't imagine that  
we've got a really \*long\* list of  
>suspects, so this shouldn't take a lot of time. Now, who actually  
<br>knows you have this curse, and of those people, who would want to  
  
>give it to you in such an inopportune manner, hm?"<br> "Well,  
there's Shampoo, for starters. And her great-grandmother..."  
> "Yeah... and either of them is mean enough to do it, too. But  
<br>why? It doesn't make sense. I mean, Shampoo wants me..."  
> Ryoga pulled a face at me. "Hmph. Don't \*we\* have an ego!"<br> "Can  
you deny it? It's why she's here in Japan, just ask her!"  
> "Okay, okay..."<br> "Anyway, what would curing you solve for them?  
It would be  
>preferable to them that you get together with Akane, which would  
<br>free me up. Something like this would obviously do the opposite  
  
>of that -- I don't need to tell you that Akane is probably not  
<br>going to be in any mood to have anything to do with you for quite  
  
>a while." He looked very sad and thoughtful for a moment, and  
<br>then...  
> "I suppose that rules out Ukyou for the same reason." I nodded.  
<br>"How about Akari? She'd like it that Akane's out of my life.."  
  
> I almost burst out laughing. "Do you really think she'd do that?  
<br>For that matter, do you really think she KNOWS you spend every  
night  
>in Akane's bed?" Then I stopped laughing, as it began to make  
sense:<br>"She'd be livid. Hmm... well, if she had found out, it's  
within the  
>realm of possibility, but I dunno. Doesn't seem her style. Doesn't  
<br>she actually \*like\* you as a pig, after all?" Ryoga actually  
winced



>at that thought.<br> "Anyway, we've made it home. Let me get you into the dojo..."

>and I sprang onto the roof, clutching his hand (I was glad to be  
<br>a girl, or I'd have really felt strange holding a guy's hand).

>We landed in the courtyard, just outside of the dojo. I peeked  
<br>inside to assure myself that no one was in there, and the two of

>us slunk in.<br> Behind the back wall of the dojo, on which the calligraphed word

>"HA-RO-I" hung, were a couple of empty practice rooms. I showed  
<br>Ryoga into one of them.

> "You can stay here for the time being, while I try to get to the  
<br>bottom of this. Just try and keep quiet if you hear someone using

>the dojo " although if it's me, and I'm by myself, I'll let you know  
<br>it's safe, okay?" Ryoga nodded, and began unpacking some foodstuffs

>from his backpack. "Great. Just make yourself at home. Just try  
<br>not to be seen. And for that matter, don't go anywhere, either...

>you might wind up somewhere that isn't healthy for you t'be. I'll  
<br>be back if I find something out." I bounded back out of the courtyard,

>and landed at the front door. Might as well enter as if nothing was  
<br>unusual" which, I suppose, would be unusual in and of itself.

> "Tadaima! I'm hooome! Kasumi?"<br> "Oh, hello there, Ranma. I think Father wants to see you: something

>he needs to say to you, I think." She shot him a bit of a look. I  
<br>wandered into the dining room and sat down next to him. He seemed

>rather contrite. Good.<br> "Son, I have discussed this matter with Kasumi, and she believes I

>may have over-reacted in throwing you out of the house this morning."<br>Well, \*duh\*. "I realize now that you had nothing to do with Ryoga's

>actions, and had no knowledge of what transpired until I told you.  
<br>Can you forgive me?"

> Hey, as long as things are back to something resembling normal,  
<br>I'm not too concerned. I just wish he wouldn't keep pulling that

>demon-head thing in the first place. He \*always\* ends up regretting  
<br>it. Anyway, yeah, I forgave him, and got the usual sobs of gratitude

>from him. Then he straightened up and calmed himself.<br> "Now son, while it was unreasonable of me to hold you responsible

>for what happened this morning -- it's not as though anyone would  
<br>have suspected Ryoga of such tendencies -- I believe you must

>redouble your efforts. Akane's honor is at stake here, and you're  
<br>her fiancÃ©. You've \*got\* to keep an eye out for her. I want you

>to protect her."<br> "Don't worry, Mr. Tendo. I want to get to the bottom of this every

>bit as much as you do." That my motives were entirely different from  
<br>what he was going to believe was irrelevant. I was telling the truth,

>after all.. sort of. But if he knew how I was going about looking  
<br>for the truth... oh boy, would there be hell to pay.

><br> I gulped down my meal faster than usual, which, according to some

>folks, is saying a lot. Still, I had a... `guest' to look after, so<br>I knew I'd need to check on him periodically. But maybe for once,

>I'd give credit where it was due, first, since I was pretty sure<br>that otherwise, I was being rather rude:

> "Kasumi, it's been another wonderful meal. Thanks."<br> "Not at all," she smiled. Practically beamed, in fact. Hmm.

>I gotta try complimenting her more often. She's cute when she<br>smiles, too. "It's always a pleasure, seeing how enthusiastically

>you eat everything I serve." All at once I could feel the heat of<br>an angry aura behind me. I didn't have to turn around to figure

>out who it was, but like an idiot, I did anyway.<br> Yup. Akane. Mad as usual. A compliment to Kasumi was an insult

>to her, always. I just can't win, can I? Now I remembered why I<br>\*didn't\* usually do that.

> "Hey... what is it this time? Aw, c'mon Akane, can't I compliment<br>Kasumi on a job well done?" I started inching backwards as she

>stood up and approached me.<br> "Will you STOP mentioning cooking around me, you insensitive baka?!"

> "What!? I wasn't talking to you, I wa--" Then my words got stuck<br>in my throat as I looked her up and down and noticed she was holding...

> "P-CHAN??! How... how the hell did he get here?"<br> "DON'T TRY TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT!" Well, I could still relax.

>She wasn't about to drop her precious pet pig in order to hit me.<br>But I definitely needed to put some distance between me and her at

>any rate. I vaulted over her head, and landed in the courtyard.<br>"Can we talk about this later, Akane? I gotta go." I yelled over

>my shoulder as I sped to the dojo.<br>

> I hurried back to the practice rooms behind the dojo. "Ryoga?<br>It's me."

> "Yeah, right here." I let out a sigh of relief.<br> "Okay, good. So then that wasn't you in there."

> "Wasn't me where?"<br> "In the dining room, stupid."

> "Are you kidding? What kind of an idiot do you think I am?

Akane<br>and her dad would kill me if they found me." He shuddered audibly.

>"Why on earth would I go there?"<br> "I dunno, but Akane's got P-Chan with her right now..."

> "What? That's impossible! I'M P-Chan!"<br> "Hunh. NOW you admit it. Just you \*try\* telling that to her."

>I was considering breaking the truth to her about you -- hey, don't<br>look at me like that, it's better than having her think you're a

>complete pervert, ne? Besides, it was her idea to have you sleeping<br>with her in the first place, so it's not like she could blame anybody

>but herself -- but since you're cured, we can't prove you change into<br>a pig. And since she has a pig already --"

> "Whoa, back up. She's found another pig? Already?"<br> "Yeah, and he's a dead ringer for ya. Everything but the bandana."

>It's white and kinda lumpy instead of yellow."<br> "Ranma!" He stood up and grabbed my by the collar. "This is not

>a coincidence!"<br> "Erm, fine. Could you let go'a me?"  
> "Oh, sorry." He dropped me to the ground, and started pacing.  
<br>"It makes perfect sense now. Whoever cured me cursed himself (or  
  
>herself --" I winced at the thought of some \*girl\* wanting to be  
<br>P-chan, and he took note of my reaction, "hey, you never know.)  
  
>So now they've replaced me. It's a perfect motive!<br> "But who  
would do it? And who \*could\*?"  
> Someone else who wants to sleep with that kawaiiikune tomboy?  
<br>Geez, there are some SICK people in this world, aren't there?  
> Hold it... what kinda pervert would...?<br> That was IT. I could  
see the light bulb go on over Ryoga, too.  
>We said it together.<br> "Happosai!"  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*part 3  
><br> Ryoga and I waited until the dead of night to continue our  
  
>investigation. Even if we were positive that the little creep  
<br>wasn't going to be in his room, there was no sense in alerting  
  
>anyone else. After all, Ryoga was already persona non grata for  
<br>having been caught in bed with Akane this morning. And I didn't  
  
>want to dump hot water and expose the fake P-chan for who he was  
<br>until I was absolutely certain who he was and how to deal with  
him.  
>Besides, I'd gotten into enough trouble from trying that stunt  
<br>before with Ryoga as P-chan. And I'd wager Happosai would put  
  
>up a lot more fight, too, especially after fondling Akane (yuk!)  
<br>for all that time.  
> Assuming it \*was\* Happosai, I wondered whether Mr. Tendo would  
<br>deal with him in the same manner as he had with Ryoga. I snorted  
  
>in derision at the thought: Yeah, right. Consistency was never  
<br>old man Tendo's strong suit. Unless you counted being  
consistently  
>wimpy. He's hardly any better than my old man.<br> Around midnight  
or so, I bolted awake (a true warrior can tell  
>his body when to get up, and have it obey, no matter the time.  
<br>Now, in case you're wondering why I'm so hard to wake up on  
school  
>days if this is the case, it's because I don't consider school that  
<br>important. But you knew that, didn't you?) and crept out my  
bedroom  
>window. I leaped to the ground, and landed silently on my toes.  
<br>A couple of hops, and I was over the pond and in the dojo.  
> "Ryoga!" I hissed. The only reply was a rather sleepy mumble.  
<br>Aw, crap. I wandered back to the practice rooms. There he was,  
  
>still sound asleep. Okay then, kiddo...<br> I grabbed a fire bucket  
from the dojo, and filled it with pond  
>water. I walked back to the practice room, and drizzled the water  
<br>onto his head (It's quieter than just splashing the bucket at  
him).  
>After a moment or two, he sat up, spluttering and spitting  
water.<br> "Hey, what's the big idea?" I put on a big grin.  
> "Oh c'mon, Ryoga. Doesn't that feel good, to get hit with cold  
<br>water and not change into something? Come on, we gotta check out

>the old lech's room, okay?"<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> We crossed the moonlit courtyard to the house, and climbed the wall  
<br>underneath Happosai's window. If we were right, we wouldn't  
encounter

>him. Of course, if we were wrong, we'd have some explaining to do.  
<br>Maybe something about refining our ninja skills, and would he  
please

>teach us some? That might just settle him down.<br> The window was  
surprisingly easy to jimmy open, leading both of

>us to suspect a trap. Of course, I've had pretty good luck with  
<br>Akane's bedroom window before, so maybe it's just the windows...

> We tumbled inside as quietly as we could. Ryoga rummaged around  
<br>in his backpack, handed me some cylindrical object. I stared at  
it,

>trying to figure out what the heck it was as my eyes attempted to  
<br>adjust to the darkness indoors. Ryoga stood up.

> "The switch is right here, Ranma.." and he turned the flashlight  
<br>on for me.

> "Thanks... I guess. You're not expecting a tip for this, are you?"  
<br>He switched on a flashlight of his own.

> "Not until you suggested it... How much ya got on you?"<br> I was  
pretty sure he was kidding, so I figured I was safe dishing a

>little back: "Nothing but this flashlight. Y'know, you're starting  
<br>t'sound like Nabiki."

> "Hey, you brought it up..." I could see him grin in the dim glow.  
<br>I scowled, ever so slightly "Okay, okay. Let's look around, and

>keep it down, ne?"<br> As expected, the old coot wasn't there. Of  
course, that didn't

>necessarily mean that he was the one impersonating P-chan; for all  
<br>his absence proved, he would be out on one of his late-night  
panty

>raids. Not that he really needed any more than what he had. The  
<br>room itself was already ankle-deep in bras and panties. And there

>wasn't a stick of furniture to be seen, either... the old freak  
<br>probably just slept on the panties, using them as a futon. I

>couldn't speak for Ryoga, but my skin was crawling. "Man, what  
<br>IS it with this creep, huh?"

> "No kiddin'. Can't this guy just rob a department store and get  
<br>it over with?"

> "Actually, I think they haveta be \*used\* to have any effect for  
him."<br> "Too weird! No \*wonder\* you don't like being stuck as a  
girl around

>him."<br> "Yeah..." I was really getting uncomfortable rummaging  
through all

>this underwear. "Uh, look... I'm gonna check out this closet,  
okay?"<br> Ryoga was holding up a suspicious-looking garment, and  
eyeing it

>dubiously. "Sure, whatever.." he hissed back absently. "What the  
<br>hell \*is\* this for?"

> I didn't even bother to look back. "How should I know? I don't  
<br>wear girl's stuff if I can avoid it, even if I \*am\* a girl, okay?

> "...Holy moley! Check it out!"<br> Ryoga scrambled to his feet and  
headed over to the closet. "What

>is it? And keep it down, ne?" I nodded and gestured into the open  
<br>closet.  
> The shelves were filled with vials and jars of water, each of them  
<br>with labels identifying them as having come from one or another  
of  
>the cursed springs of Jusenkyo. I turned to Ryoga.<br> "Well, I  
think this ought to prove rather conclusively that the  
>old freak's responsible for your situation. Now, all we gotta do  
<br>is find out if any of these are the Heitueniichuan so that we can  
  
>prove that he's taken your place as P-chan."<br> "Cool. So, what are  
we gonna do if we find out?"  
> "I'm not sure. Maybe pour hot water on Akane while she's \*awake\*  
<br>and holding him."  
> "But that could be really dangerous. She'd be holding a thoroughly  
<br>pissed-off Happosai who's been groping at her for how long? His  
  
>power would be something else! Suppose he takes it out on her?"<br>  
"And wrecks his main power source? I don't think so, Ryoga.  
  
>You'll notice he never gropes Kasumi, either. There really are  
<br>limits to what the old geezer will do. Not many, but there are  
  
>some. We'll just have to rely on that."<br> "Yeah, but we'll still  
have to be the ones to deal with him  
>somehow... you \*know\* Mr. Tendo won't do anything, even if he  
<br>really \*is\* molesting his baby girl." He started to growl at  
  
>the injustice of that fact.<br> "Take it easy, tiger... yeah, that  
thought's already occurred  
>to me."<br> "So, whatcha gonna do?"  
> "That, I haven't worked out yet. Look, we still gotta find a  
<br>container of Heituenniichuan yet."  
> "Right." And so into the closet we went, and closed the door  
<br>behind us to muffle the noise.  
><br> Happosai had himself quite the collection in here.  
Yaazuniichuan,  
>Maoniichuan -- that would ensure that Mousse and Shampoo stay the  
<br>way they are. Gouniichuan... heh, heh. To think I once thought  
  
>that Ryoga might have fallen into that spring. So I hadn't met  
<br>Yamada's dog Bess yet. So sue me.  
> ...Jiiniichuan... Drowned Chicken? Well... I guess it's possible.  
<br>What's this bottle? Oh, no, wait a minute, that's just part of  
the  
>old coot's sake collection.<br> "Hey, get a load of this jar...  
Yuuniichuan"  
> "Spring of Drowned \*Fish\*? How's that possible?"<br> "Take a look."  
He handed me the jar. Nothing but powder inside.  
>Well, I guess that explains how a fish drowns.<br> "So how would  
someone get immersed in this stuff, anyway?"  
> "Dunno. Whaddya add to powdered water, after all?" We looked at  
<br>each other and shrugged. I gave the jar back to Ryoga to return  
to  
>its rightful place.<br>  
> Then I opened the closet.<br> "Ah-HA! Paydirt!"  
><br> Ryoga set down the jar he was looking at, and darted over.  
There  
>it was! a barrel full of water from the...<br> ...NYANNiichuan?

> Ryoga stared at the barrel for a moment, and turned to me.<br>  
"There but for a typographical error... you know, for a while

>there, you had me thinking you were quite the detective, Ranma.  
<br>You of \*all\* people should know that that water's from the Spring

>of Drowned \*Maiden\*."<br> I just stood there, staring at the barrel.  
Why on earth..?

> Ryoga seemed to have the same question. "Why in Kami's name would  
<br>the old freak be lugging all this water with him, anyway?" Just  
then

>I turned over a bottle of Naininiichuan -- Spring of Drowned Cow  
--<br>and it struck me.

> "Sustenance!"<br> "Hunh?"

> "Well, a fellow's gotta eat, ne? Imagine this; pour a little bit  
<br>of this on a grasshopper, or some such, and boom! Instant cow!  
Milk

>and meat for the taking just like that. As for that barrel over  
there<br>...well, we both know he gets his strength from feeling  
chicks up, or

>at least from their underwear. Same deal as with this stuff... turn  
<br>an insect or what have you into a girl -- with the brain of an  
insect,

>so she won't be likely to resist much, either -- and he can power up  
<br>at will.

> "Of course, he obviously prefers the genuine article, although I'd  
<br>still question his taste in what he considers to be genuinely  
feminine.

>Still, he's gotta take what he can get -- Akane's the only girl I  
know <br>of who keeps a live teddy bear, of sorts." All of a sudden,  
a faint

>green glow outlined Ryoga.<br> "How \*dare\* you say such things about  
Akane being unfeminine!" he

>hissed. "Even if she \*does\* hate me, I won't let you get away with  
<br>that kind of talk!" I backed away from him as far as the cramped

>quarters of the closet would let me.<br> "Hey, hey.. take it easy,  
kiddo. I didn't mean any harm by it.

>Calm down.. you wanna get us caught? You're in enough trouble with  
<br>the Tendos as it is." Okay. That shut him down. We resumed our

>ransacking of the closet. Eventually, Ryoga -- it \*would\* be him  
<br>-- managed to find the telltale Heitueniichuan. "Well, that  
settles

>it. We've found our P-chan impersonator. Now we gotta figure out  
<br>what to do about it, huh?"

> "No kidding. You know, we \*still\* haven't found any Nanniichuan  
yet."<br> "Yeah, I know... that worries me."

> "Whaddya mean?"<br> "Well, s'pose he only brought back the one vial  
or whatever that

>he nailed you with? So now there isn't any left for me to change  
<br>back with."

> "Your problem, not mine, Ranma-chan."<br> "Hey... I wouldn't gloat  
if I were you, P-chan."

> "I'm \*not\* P-chan!" Then, quieter, almost... wistfully, "Not  
<br>anymore, anyway."

> I turned the jar of Naininiichuan over several times in my  
hands.<br>"I wonder what beef from a cow like this would taste like?"

> "Good question, Ranma."<br> A wrinkled old voice behind us startled

us. "Actually, it tastes  
>like chicken, boys." We spun around, and the closet door opened to  
<br>a bright light.  
> The old coot must have heard us rummaging around, and came in  
<br>to check on us. By turning on the all the lights in the room, he  
  
>ensured that we'd be temporarily blinded when the door was  
opened.<br>And that was all the time he needed. The old coot leaped  
at the  
>two of us, and before either of us could react, everything went  
<br>black.  
><br> The next thing I was aware of was I was landing on something.  
  
>A tall pine tree, I think. And the top of one, to boot. The old  
<br>pervert can really kick, I thought to myself as I fell, crashing  
  
>through the branches and landing with a reasonably soft `thud' on  
<br>the ground. That had to be the first time I hadn't landed in  
water  
>in a long time.<br> When I stood up, I realized why: I was already a  
girl. Water  
>wouldn't do me any good or harm. Now that I was looking, my  
clothes<br>were pretty rumpled and torn. Dammit. The old lech musta  
copped a  
>really good feel before sending me into orbit like that. No wonder  
<br>he got such distance.  
> CRACK-CRACK-CRUNCH! THUMP!!<br> Hmm. Make that `sending \*us\* into  
orbit.'  
><br> Ryoga hadn't landed too far away, so after checking myself for  
any  
>serious injuries (there weren't any), I walked over to where he had  
<br>fallen to check on him. He was lying half facing down, and half  
on  
>his side away from me.<br> "Oi... Ryoga!" I shook him. He moaned a  
little, and that surprised  
>me. Not that he might be feeling some pain; Happosai could inflict  
<br>damage with the best of `em, I hadda give the old geezer that  
much  
>credit. No, the moan surprised me because...<br> ...and then, \*SHE\*  
turned over to face me.  
><br>\*\*\*\*\* part 4  
><br> Ryoga hadn't landed too far away, so after checking myself for  
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<br>damage with the best of `em, I hadda give the old geezer that  
much  
>credit. No, the moan surprised me because...<br> ...and then, \*SHE\*  
turned over to face me.  
><br> I musta yelped, and jumped several yards away, because Ryoga  
  
>(or would it be Ryoga-chan?) sat up, somewhat perturbed at my  
<br>reaction.  
> "What's \*your\* problem, Ranma?" and then she stopped, and  
<br>realized what her voice sounded like. She looked down at herself.

>"AAAAH!!" <br> I gave her a half-smile. "Well, now you know what I go through.

>Sorry that this messes up your cure..."<br> She pulled open his shirt slightly and just stared. "I'm...

>a girl!"<br> "Uh-huh. It would explain how the old geezer got up enough

>strength to boot us this far, wouldn't it?" Ryoga just shivered <br>at the thought of having been felt up by Happosai. "Hey, what're

>you actin' squeamish for? At least you had the benefit of not <br>being conscious this time."

> "What, he didn't knock you out?"<br> "Oh yeah, \*this\* time. But normally he doesn't bother, and he

>can grab an awful lot even before \*I\* can send him flying." I <br>walked over and extended my hand. "How ya feelin' otherwise?"

>Think you can walk?"<br> She grabbed onto my hand, and I pulled her up. "Yeah, thanks.

>I'll be okay... I think."<br> "Now to figure out where we are..."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> We were fortunate enough to have landed near what appeared to

>be a major highway. There was a sign off the shoulder, and we <br>walked over to find out.

> "In.. teru.. s'tah.. te.. 97. O.. re.. gon. No.. ru.. tsu. <br>Oh! North! Now, where the heck's O-re-gon?" All at once, I wish

>I'd studied harder in my geography class.<br> "How should \*I\* know, Ranma? I may have been here before, but

>that won't help, you know. And we'd better do something quick -- <br>it's getting dark out."

> "Okay, then. C'mon, Ryoga. Stuck out your thumb and make with <br>a 'cute 'n' helpless' look."

> "Say what?"<br> "I said..."

> "I heard what you \*said\*. What do you \*mean\*?"<br> "I mean... we're gonna hitch a ride."

> Ryoga looked thunderstruck. "A ride?"<br> "Yeah... we stick out our thumb, and that means we wanna lift

>from whoever's willing to give us one. I'm not sure where we are <br>just yet, but I'm willing to bet we've got a long way to go to get

>back to Japan. Best thing to do is to keep moving. The 'cute 'n' <br>helpless' bit's just to guarantee we get picked up soon. Just

>trust me on this one -- girls have much better luck getting lifts. <br>Watch..." And I wandered to the edge of the road, facing the traffic

>and begin taking a few backwards steps. I stuck my right thumb out,<br>and with my left hand, I waved at the cars. "Yoo hoo!" Ryoga was

>watching me as if he was observing an alien life form -- Could it be<br>that, in all of his travels, it had never occurred to him to hitch

>a ride with someone?<br> At any rate, within a few minutes, an 18-wheel semi pulled over,

>and a big beefy guy waved me in.<br> "Where ya headed, miss?" He was speaking English. Well, that

>narrows down where we'd landed. A little. Boy, that pervert can <br>get some distance going, can't he?

> "Oh, I'm not particular. You're going north?" And to think <br>Miss



Hinako assumed I wasn't paying attention in her class!  
>Thank heavens I \*was\*!.<br> "Yeah, as far as Seattle. Hop in if ya wanna."  
> "Uh... do you have room for my friend here?" I waved frantically  
<br>for Ryoga-chan to come over. The trucker's eyes lit up at the idea  
>of having \*two\* female hitchhikers in his cab. Oh, boy...<br>Needless to say, we got his assent, and the two of us clambered  
  
>aboard.<br>  
> "Howdja do that, anyway?" Ryoga-chan whispered as I pulled her up  
<br>into the cab.  
> "Well, it helps, being pretty like this and all. You're tellin'  
<br>me you've never hitched a ride before?" It was a dumb question,  
  
>given Ryoga's incredulous reaction to my actions, but I just had  
<br>to know from his -- er, \*her\* -- own mouth. I wasn't gonna get  
  
>that satisfaction, though; she simply shook her head. Well, that's  
<br>good enough for me for now...  
> I slouched down in my seat, and promptly fell asleep.<br>  
  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> Some hours later, the driver nudged me awake. Dawn was  
breaking.<br> "Hey, g'morning, cutie. Y'want me t'get you two a cuppa  
coffee?  
>I gotta fuel up, and this may take some time."<br> Groggy as I was,  
I had to remember to keep acting cute. "Oh,  
>thank you, mister! But actually, could you just get Ryoga and me  
<br>some tea, please?"  
> The man blinked once, twice. "Tea? ..Yeah, sure.. tea. Okay.  
<br>Whatever." He walked off, muttering something about the point of  
  
>stopping in Seattle for coffee. I turned myself over to face  
<br>Ryoga-chan  
> "Psst! Ryoga-chan!"<br> Even in her sleep, she winced when I called  
her that. She'll  
>never get used to being a girl at this rate. Well, at least she's  
<br>cute when she does that... "Ryoga-chan! Wake up! We're here!"  
> Ryoga was having a little difficulty waking up. If it weren't for  
<br>the fact that we hadn't taken one to get here, I'd call it jet  
lag.  
>Ol' P-chan covers the globe, sure, but not \*this\* fast. "Um?  
<br>Whazzat? We in J'pan awreddy?"  
> "No, you bonehead, this guy's only taking us as far as Seattle.  
<br>And here we are!"  
> She sat up, slowly. "Oh.. really? Uh.. where is the guy,  
anyway?"<br> "Well, he offered to get us some tea. So we can change  
back."  
> "He doesn't know about Jusenkyo, does he?"<br> "No, I didn't tell  
him nothin'. And I don't see as we'll haveta.  
>Just thank him and leave. Then we'll just walk off following this  
<br>highway north."  
> "North? Why north? Japan's to the west, right?"<br> "Yeah, but this  
is the coast, Ryoga-chan.." Another wince. Gosh,  
>but that's cute to watch her do that. "D'ya really wanna swim the  
<br>Pacific? I'd say we're better off crossing the Bering Straits.  
  
>And one more thing... don't even \*try\* to lecture me on  
geography,<br>lost boy. Okay, here he comes... we might as well get

outta the

>truck. And get back to the cute act, got it?" She nodded.<br>

> Sure enough, the trucker was coming out of the truck stop holding,  
<br>a cardboard carrier with three cups wedged into it. The fourth

>compartment, as it turned out, held a couple of tea bags for Ryoga  
<br>and me. Not that we'd be using them (Bag tea? These Americans

>don't know anything, do they?)<br> "Here ya go, girls," he announced  
as he handed the two of us our

>hot water.<br> "Gee, thanks mister!" we chorused as we took our  
cups. There was

>an awkward silence as we just held them, waiting for him to bid us  
<br>good-bye, or one of us to start walking off. Ryoga-chan broke the

>silence after a minute or two.<br> "Well, sir, you were saying this  
is as far as you go, right?

>So we'll just be on our way." And she turned to head toward the  
<br>highway. I scurried after her, because she was walking \*away\*

>from the highway. As usual. And that's when the trucker chased  
<br>after both of us.

> "Ah-ah-ah.. not so fast, girllies. We haven't discussed payment,  
<br>have we?" Uh-oh. This didn't look good.

> "Ah.. er.. well.. we don't have much in the way of money,  
mister.."<br> "Oh, that's okay. Money's not the issue." We breathed a  
sigh of

>relief. He draped an arm over each of our shoulders and started to  
<br>lead us toward the truck stop.

> "Naw, money's not a problem. I was makin' the trip anyway, so  
<br>it's no additional cost f'r me t'pick you girls up. On the other

>hand.." and now it was clear we were going \*behind\* the truck stop  
<br>rather than \*into\* it, "..there's a bit of something a man  
doesn't

>get much of on the road that you two girls have plenty of, I'll  
bet."<br>Oh, no. This was getting \*really\* uncomfortable. I looked  
over at

>Ryoga-chan. She just looked puzzled. The baka. She's not been a  
<br>girl long enough to realize what this guy was sayin'.

> "Oh now, please, mister. We're not like that. We're not those  
<br>kind of girls!" I protested. Now we were behind the truck stop.

>He took his arms off our shoulders. I almost tried to bolt, but  
<br>he grabbed my collar and started to unbutton my shirt.

Ryoga-chan,

>the idiot just stood there.<br> "No? Well, we'll just have to \*make\*  
you into those kind of girls,

>won't we?"<br> As alarmed as I was by the sudden turn of events, I  
figured there

>was no need to panic. In fact, I didn't need to go full out. I  
<br>pounded him furiously in the chest, just flicking my wrists like  
a

>cute girl might fight in close quarters "(Kaishu Tenshin  
Amaguriken!)"<br>I whispered to myself. He dropped me like a hot  
chestnut and backed

>off, clutching his chest.<br> "What the hell-?"

> Then I dumped the water on myself, and signaled Ryoga to do the  
<br>same. The trucker's eyes bugged.

> "Y'know, we'd'a preferred to have just left and done this

privately, <br>mister. I said we weren't those kinda girls, and I meant it. Now,  
>may we go, or are you gonna give us any more trouble?" He shook his  
<br>head vigorously. "Fine. C'mon, Ryoga, let's get going."  
> "By the way," I called over my shoulder, "we really did appreciate  
<br>your giving us a ride here. Sorry about having to nail you like

>that..."<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> We continued north for the rest of the day, staying at least  
<br>within earshot of the highway. As night fell, we camped by the

>Canadian border.<br>

> As the sun began to rise, we found ourselves at the edge of  
<br>another city: Vancouver.

> We wandered around for a little while, and once downtown, we  
<br>fell in step with a couple of girls and a guy.

> The shorter girl spoke first, to Ryoga: "Hey, you look vaguely  
<br>familiar. Have I seen you before?"

> "Well," Ryoga responded, "I suppose it's possible. I travel a  
<br>lot, so I run into a lot of people on my way..."

> "Hey, check it out!" The taller, dark-haired girl grinned.

<br>"Mike -- this kid in the bandanna. Doesn't he sound like you?

>Whaddya think?"<br> "Well, I don't know..." Man, she was right. This  
guy was a

>dead ringer for him. If I closed my eyes, I'd never know the  
<br>difference.

><br> "Actually, we're not from around here, though.. and we're  
trying

>to get back home. Can you tell us how to get to Tokyo?" I couldn't  
<br>help rolling my eyes. Somehow I didn't think these three would

>understand that Ryoga meant to get there on foot. <br> "Tokyo? As in  
Japan?" Oh boy, have we got rocket scientists,

>or what? Ryoga just nodded at the question. Maybe he was used <br>to  
asking people for directions to strange places. "Well, you'll

>need to get a plane to get there, won't you? I mean, how'd you  
<br>get here from there, anyway?"

> Okay, so we had to admit, we did fly. "Yeah, but we don't have  
<br>the cash to get plane tickets back or nothin'..."

> "Yeah? Well, ya know, our company imports and exports stuff  
<br>between here and Japan. Maybe we can get you boys jobs as  
couriers.

>You'd just have to hand-carry some stuff to our people in Tokyo,  
<br>and then you'd be all set! The company might even pay you for  
it!"

> Now \*this\* was something. "You mean it? That'd be terrific!"<br>  
Mike held up his hand. "Hold on. We can't promise anything,

>fellas. But we can try, okay?" Hey, anything beats marching across  
<br>the Bering Straits in mid-winter. I'll take my chances with it.

> "Sure. I'm in. Whaddya say, Ryoga?"<br> "Beats walking. And I would  
know." The three of them just kept

>staring at him as we headed to their office.<br> "I'm telling you,  
Mike. This -- Ryoga, wasn't it?" He nodded.

>"-- I'd swear, he seems so familiar. And he sounds just like  
you!"<br> "I dunno, Sarah. I bet you could sound like the other kid

pretty

>well..." What? This joker thinks I sound like a girl?<br> "Oh, come on, Mike. I'm a contralto, but..." and her voice dropped  
>an octave, "it doesn't go \*that\* far down, does it?" Well, maybe it  
<br>did. She turned to the other girl. "What do you think, Venus?"

> The shorter girl shrugged. "I think you're both all wet."<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> As it turned out, Mike was as good as his word about getting a  
<br>position as couriers. In the course of a day or two, they had

>found a number of packages to be shipped to Japan, and we were  
<br>off to the airport with them, armed with third-class tickets and

>a decent stipend in the bargain.<br> Let me tell ya, sitting aboard  
a 747, even if it \*is\* third class,  
>beats all that hiking any day. Or swimming, for that matter. Man,  
<br>if we'd known about hiring ourselves out as couriers, Pop and I

>coulda gotten to China so easy.. of course, if we'd known everything  
<br>about Jusenkyo, Pop and I wouldn't'a gone in the first place. At

>least, I'd \*hope\* we wouldn't have.<br>

> "Okay, Ryoga. I think we're gonna haveta split up when we get  
<br>back. You know that I'm gonna either haveta come back with your

>hide, or \*you're\* gonna haveta hide. So we'll deliver these packages  
<br>together (gotta earn our keep here, after all, ne?), and then  
we'll

>find our separate ways back. I'll go to the dojo, and you... aim  
<br>for Furinkan High. I'll probably be in class by the time you find

>it, anyway."<br> Ryoga nodded, and turned to face out the window. "I  
just hate

>having to hide like this. It's not like I did anything wrong. <br>I  
just wanted to be with her..."

> "Yeah, well... if you were a girl -- and you can be, now -- would  
<br>\*you\* like it for a man to show up in your bed, unexpected and

>uninvited? Come on pal, get real. Besides, you're in her bedroom  
<br>every night, watching her get undressed and all... geez, and she

>thinks \*I'm\* the pervert. Personally, I think you've gotten away  
<br>with waaaay too much for waaaay too long.

> "Of course... now it's Happosai who's probably getting away with  
<br>it. And I gotta admit, if someone has t'do this to Akane, I'd  
much

>rather you than him.<br> "Now, if only we knew what to do about  
him..."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> When I got back to the dojo, I was met by Akane and her father.

>I'm not sure why, but she looked a little put out.<br> "And \*where\*  
have YOU been, Ranma?" I didn't think she was ready

>for the whole truth, so I figured I'd give her half of it.<br>

"Look, your dad told me to go out and pay Ryoga back for what he

>did to you, right? That's where I've been. Do you realize I've

<br>had to go halfway around the earth to find him?" Akane's reaction

>was unreadable, but Mr. Tendo seemed pleased with my response.<br>  
"That's it, son. Standing up for your fiancÃe. That's the right

>thing to do." Both of us shot him a dirty look.<br> "Thank\* you, Mr. Tendo." I said, as icily as I could. He didn't

>get it. Clueless sap. "Anyway, you don't look too happy about my  
<br>being here, Akane. Either that, or you're upset that I've been gone.

>Which is it?" At this, her angry face crumbled a bit.<br>

"Th'secndwn." she mumbled.

> "Whawazzat?"<br> "THE SECOND ONE, OKAY?" She looked kind of embarrassed to admit it.

>Well, who am I to pass up such a golden opportunity to tease her?<br> "Awww... didja miss me?"

> "What? A pervert like you? Are you kidding? It's those stupid  
<br>BOYS again!" I must have looked rather confused at that, because

>Mr. Tendo starting right in with an explanation, and never even  
<br>bothered to start sobbing again about how his little girl and her

>fiance were fighting again.<br> "That's right, son. You left so suddenly, the Furinkan student

>body assumed you two had broken up completely. For a while there,<br>\*I\* almost believed it." He scowled at me. "Next time you leave,

>give us some warning, will you?"<br> "Look, if you must know, Happosai kicked me into orbit, okay?

>I didn't exactly have time to say my goodbyes before landing in --  
<br>where was it? O-re-gon... or whatever."

> "I wasn't finished! And don't say that name! He might come back!"<br>he snapped. Then his face softened. "Look, it's understandable.

>Dealing with the master has its perils. But at any rate, everybody  
<br>at school concluded that Akane was available once again, and all

>the boys started that morning ritual she used to endure before you  
<br>got here."

> Oh, \*that\*. "I remember. And she's having trouble with them?"

<br>Now Akane \*really\* looked peeved. I'd forgotten how she took offense

>at even the slightest slur on her martial arts skills.<br> "NO! I mean..." Maybe I could actually salvage this one. I smiled.

> "No, I imagine you're not. But I'll bet you don't enjoy it one bit.  
<br>Having all those guys fight for the privilege of dating you has got to

>be a real pain. I'll bet you can't \*stand\* the fact that these guys  
<br>would give their eyeteeth to be with you â€" and some of them have, too,

>I'll wager." Erm.. maybe not: her aura was starting to fire up just  
<br>a bit.

> Then something Mr. Tendo said hit me.<br> "Wait a minute. Back up. Did you just say that Happ -- er, I mean,

>ol' Gramps hasn't been around? How long's that been going on?"<br>  
"That's right, son. It was about the same time you disappeared.

>Actually, I hadn't given it much thought that the two disappearances  
<br>might be related," Yeah, right. You don't give much thought,

>period. "but as you haven't brought him back with you, perhaps

<br>they aren't. But if you know where he is, don't tell me. I don't  
>want to know; just as long as he's not around here."<br> Speaking of  
which... "Uhm... and how's P-chan doing these days,  
>Akane?"<br> Her aura vanished as if by magic. Being taken off-guard  
will do  
>that. "Hunh? I thought you always hated him!"<br> You got that  
right, now more than ever. Still... "Hey, \*you\* like  
>the little runt; so why shouldn't I be concerned? Hasn't he always  
<br>been running off and getting lost and stuff?"  
> "Well, yeah, he used to. But he's been here that whole time  
<br>since you've been gone. He's been just fine. And \*so\*  
affectionate,  
>too!"<br> Oh, good grief. Well, it's not as if she's the first girl  
to  
>mistake lust for affection. But the fact that it's \*Happosai\*...  
<br>oog! I think I'm gonna throw up.  
> "...Did you want to see him?" Her voice snapped me out of my  
chill.<br> "Erm... NO! No, don't let him know I'm back. I doubt he'll  
be  
>too pleased about it. You know, you say I don't like him... well,  
<br>I think the feeling's mutual. So why don't you try to keep him  
and  
>me apart, if you can, okay? For the time being..."<br> She looked at  
me rather doubtfully. "Well, all right. I can't  
>argue that he doesn't like you, either. Okay," she grinned  
brightly,<br>"I'll try to keep him out of your way."  
> "Thanks, Akane." Hey, how about it? She wasn't even mad  
anymore.<br>Day saved after all!  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*part 5  
><br> Saturday night, and dinner at the Tendos tasted so much better  
for  
>having been away for several days. And really, everything seemed  
<br>even better than usual. Mr. Tendo was glad his little girl's  
  
>protector and fiance was back. Akane, too, still seemed pleased  
<br>at my presence, and had considerably left 'P-chan' in her room  
  
>while I was at the table. And Kasumi's cooking, well... what do  
<br>I need to say there? I plowed through everything as if I hadn't  
  
>eaten food in weeks. To some extent, I hadn't; at least, nothing  
<br>like this.  
> It was a Fuji Moment, one of those times when you think to yourself  
<br>that nothing could possibly go wrong now.  
> And instantly, you kick yourself for even thinking it, because  
<br>something \*does\* go wrong right then.  
> There was a knock at the door. Somehow, I knew who it was gonna  
<br>be, and I could feel my stomach sink at the very thought. I  
jumped  
>to my feet.<br> "I'll take care of that. Anybody mind?" I was met  
with a series  
>of shrugs. Well, who's gonna talk with their mouth full of Kasumi's  
<br>cooking, ne?  
><br> I met him at the door with a whispered "Keep quiet, you," and  
  
>dragged him out onto the street. "What's the big idea, man? Do  
<br>you know what coulda happened if anyone else had answered the  
door?  
>I thought I toldja to meet me at \*school\*!"<br> "Well... I couldn't

find it," big surprise there, "and, since I  
>was passing by, I thought I'd ask for directions from a familiar  
<br>face."  
> I just closed my eyes in frustration. Here's a fellow with a  
<br>grudge against me going back to antiquity, and for some reason or  
  
>another can't seem to fathom the possibility that someone might be  
<br>holding a similar grudge against him. And for more valid reasons,  
  
>too. "Do you realize how \*hostile\* those faces would be? What  
<br>were you \*thinking\*?"  
> "Well... I figured \*you'd\* answer the door, actually. If I'm  
<br>still alive and nearby, it's \*your\* rear, too, ya know."  
> Y'know, sometimes this boy's not the idiot he appears to be. He  
<br>had me there. And of course, I \*had\* come to the door thinking  
  
>that same thing. So...<br> "So... what do we do now, Ranma?"  
> I grabbed his hand. "Come on," I growled through clenched  
teeth.<br>"Back where we came from." We leaped onto the roof of the  
house,  
>and bounded over to the dojo's rear entrance. I shoved him inside.  
<br>"In ya go! And stay \*put\*, will ya?" I heaved a sigh of relief as  
  
>I closed the door. Now, back to the front gate. And I gotta  
<br>remember, pretend everything's normal...  
><br> "Who was that, Ranma-kun? And what took you so long?"  
> "Jehovah's Witness. Sorry about that."<br> "You didn't just deck  
him?" Nabiki arched her eyebrows.  
> "Why? He's unarmed. I'm not gonna fight a weakling, in any case.  
<br>I just told him we weren't interested." This seemed to satisfy  
  
>everyone, and they went back to their meal.<br> I would've, too, if  
I had any. It looked like Pop had helped  
>himself to my stuff again. Oh well. I'm home again, aren't I?<br>  
"Uh, Kasumi? Have you got seconds on the stove?"  
> "Why yes, Ranma-kun, I do. Would you be a dear and bring the  
<br>pot out?"  
> "Sure thing. Thanks!"<br>  
> While I was in the kitchen, I spotted a number of empty glass  
<br>jars Kasumi had evidently planned on using for canning or some  
  
>such. Well, she won't miss one...<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> Nightfall again. Back to the dojo. And back to trying to wake  
<br>Ryoga up. I decided against the cold water bit this time; after  
  
>all, this time he was cursed. And who would dare walk into  
Happosai's<br>room as a female? No, that would be asking for trouble.  
So I just  
>shook him until I could hear his brains rattle.<br> "C'mon, man!" I  
hissed. Boy, does this kid sleep \*hard\*.  
> "Mm.. not so hard, Akari.." Akari? Huh?<br> I picked him up and  
slapped him, and immediately shushed myself.  
>Damn, that was loud. Hope no one heard it. "Come on, you lamebrain,  
<br>we gotta get going! I've got a plan to nail this sucker but good,  
  
>but I need ya t'watch my back!"<br> Nothing. So I simply dropped  
him.  
> He fell like a sack of yams. Instantly, he sprang up.<br> "Who's  
there?" He was looking \*away\* from me. Rrrgh!

> "I'm over HERE! Turn around, will ya?!"<br> "Oh, hey, Ranma!"  
> "Keep it \*down\*, willya? C'mon, we gotta get a jarful from  
the<br>old coot's barrel."  
> "What for?"<br> "Never mind that for now, okay? Just trust me. I  
know what I'm  
>doing."<br> "Yeah, right."  
> "\*You\* got any bright ideas?" He shook his head. "Okay,  
then.<br>Let's go!"  
><br> The old geezer's room was pretty much the same as when we last  
saw  
>it. I guess even Kasumi thinks better of courting danger by tidying  
<br>up `the Master's' room, even if he isn't around, supposedly. We  
  
>went straight to the barrel and dipped the jar in. Once the jar was  
<br>sealed, we stole out. Whew. No sign of the old fart. Probably too  
  
>cozy sleeping with Akane - brr! - to notice. And hey... we'd learned  
<br>our lesson; we were much faster this time.  
><br> "Fine," said Ryoga once we were safely in his practice room in  
the  
>dojo, "we've got a jar of Nyanniichuan water. How's this gonna  
help<br>us get back at Happ-?"  
> I had clapped my hand over his mouth. For once, I was gonna  
<br>believe even Mr. Tendo. "Don't even say the name, Ryoga. Just in  
  
>case, okay?" He nodded. I removed my hand. "Okay, you're  
right.<br>This jar is not gonna solve our problems, in and of itself.  
But it's  
>gonna make a really good bargaining chip for getting what we  
\*really\*<br>need." He continued to look at me with a puzzled and  
worried  
>expression. "Don't worry, Ryoga. Get some rest. Tomorrow, we  
go<br>out for ramen. And we go together, ne? So wait for me."  
> He shrugged. "Whatever you say..." He wasn't convinced.<br>  
  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
> I hadn't actually planned to have breakfast at the Neko-Hanten  
<br>that morning. Ryoga and I just had some business to transact,  
which  
>had nothing to do with food. If Ryoga wanted to get some ramen for  
<br>himself, well, that would be his prerogative.  
> Of course, I hadn't realized Akane would be cooking breakfast.  
<br>So much for `all's well with the world'...  
> Everybody else had cleared out, in anticipation of her attempt,  
<br>but she wasn't gonna let me go that easily. I did try to be  
polite  
>and choke down a bite or two, but that was about all I could  
take.<br> "Please, Akane, I took a bite of it. Can I go now?"  
> "NO! Eat what's on your plate!" If it were Kasumi's cooking  
there,<br>it would be but a morsel. But the same size helping of  
Akane's home  
>cooking was like Fuji-san itself. No \*way\* I was gonna  
survive<br>eating that.  
> "Look, Akane... I'll make you a deal. Since I've eaten a few  
bites<br>of mine, why don't you take a few bites of yours? Then I'll  
eat, and  
>the you eat, and so on. Sound fair?"<br> She had to admit, it was  
more reasonable than some of my usual  
>suggestions of what to do with her food. So she took a bite.<br> And  
passed out. Just as I'd anticipated.



> I went up to my room, grabbed some of my stipend money and the jar<br>of Nyanniichuan, and headed for the dojo.  
> "C'mon, Ryoga... we're outta here! Let's grab some breakfast."<br>Ryoga took a sniff of the air. "Akane's been cooking, ne?"  
> I nodded.<br> "Well, what're we waiting for?" And we were off.

><br> "Okay... so what're you planning to do with that stuff? It's  
>gonna do us no good."<br> "It's not \*for\* us, Ryoga. It's for --"

> Splash. That @##Â¥\* old lady again. "-- Shampoo.<br> "See, \*we\* may not like being like this, but she's \*supposed\* to  
>be. In any case, I can be rid of that -- brrr! -- cat once and for  
<br>all, too."  
> "Oh! I get it! And we might be able to trade with the old  
ghoul<br>for something that'll help us nail Happosai with, huh?"  
> I grinned. "You're learning, Ryoga-chan."<br> Another one of those  
cute winces.  
><br> "Welcome to Nekohanten... aiya! Ai ren!" As usual, Shampoo  
>charged and glomped onto me. Fortunately, I handed the jar to  
<br>Ryoga-chan before she connected, so it was safe. Still, I wanted  
>her off of me as soon as possible.<br> "Uh, Shampoo... could you let  
go? We're both girls, y'know..."  
>I pushed her away from me, as gently as I could. Look, I don't love  
<br>her, and I never could, but there's never any sense in riling  
her,  
>so I gotta treat her with kid gloves, too. Sometimes, it's amazing  
<br>how much like Akane she can be, when I think about it. Not that I  
>usually get the chance to think...<br> Anyway, she did step back,  
blushing slightly. She knew, and I  
>knew, that I was really a guy, but there were customers, and who's  
<br>to say who was a regular and knew about me, too? Even Shampoo  
>doesn't want people thinking she's a pervert. Then the blush  
<br>turned angry.  
> "Who this, Ranma? You have another fiancée?" Her blue battle  
<br>aura was starting to fire up. Geez. I don't even have to say or  
>do anything to get into trouble sometimes.<br> "Actually, no.  
Shampoo -- gimme a second, will ya? -- this is  
>Ryoga."<br> "What kind baka you take Shampoo for?"  
> "Look, Shampoo, c'mon... can we have some hot water? I'll prove  
<br>it to ya."  
> Then the old ghoul decided to get into the act. "Son-in-law! <br>To  
what do we owe this rare honor of your visit?" Her voice was  
>dripping with sarcasm -- it had been... what? Two, three weeks?  
<br>-- since I'd been to the Nekohanten. Not that she'd know or care  
>that I was out of the country. Then she noticed Ryoga. "And who's  
<br>this?"  
> "I've already fielded that question. Can we see you two out  
back?"<br>We wandered into the kitchen.  
> Shampoo was filling a teakettle and setting it on the stove.  
<br>"Ai ren say this Ryoga. He no fool Shampoo. He no dare." She  
>gave me another angry look. I rolled my eyes.<br> "The hot water,

please." I muttered impatiently. "I'll explain  
>everything then. And only then, okay?"<br> A few minutes later, the  
two of us got our hot water, and the two  
>amazons got a big surprise.<br> "Ai ya! Ryoga no pig, he girl! How  
happen?"  
> "Erm... it's a long story. Look, Shampoo... Cologne... we brought  
<br>something for you.." Ryoga held the jar out in front of himself  
as  
>if he were handling toxic waste.<br> "So... what is it, boy?" The  
old woman hopped over to examine it.  
>Her eyes widened in surprise and something resembling glee.  
"Shampoo!<br>It's Nyanniichuan water! Your husband and his friend --"

> "I am NOT her husband!"<br> "I am NOT his friend!"  
> "-- have brought us your cure!"<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*part 6<br>  
> We returned from the Neko-Hanten carrying the same jar we'd  
brought<br>with us. For all anyone knew, we were leaving the place  
with exactly  
>what we came in with.<br> Ryoga insisted on arguing with me about  
this. "So would you mind  
>telling me exactly how this is gonna solve our problems with Happa  
--<br>erm, the old fart?"  
> "You're still thinking in terms of punishing him directly,  
Ryoga.<br>We're gonna do this fairly. Verdict first, sentence  
afterward.  
>This," and I shook the sealed jar for emphasis, "is all part of my  
<br>plan to have him condemn himself outta his own mouth, okay?"  
> "Yeah, well, all I can say is your plans take waaay too long to  
<br>unfold. I wanna get back into Akane-san's good graces. And soon."

> "What, so you go back to sleeping with her? Dream on, buddy.  
<br>Why don'tcha just stick with Akari or something? It's so much  
>safer. She's willing, she loves you, and -- will you wipe your  
<br>nose? You're gonna get blood all over your shirt.  
> "Anyway, tomorrow morning, we strike."<br>  
>\*\*\*<br>  
> I decided the straightforward method was the best approach. None  
<br>of this sneaking around garbage. No, I'd just walk in, dump a mug  
>of warm water on him, and accuse him of impersonating P-chan. Even  
<br>Akane would believe me, as the old fart had tried that stunt on  
>practically the first day he'd arrived at the Tendo's.<br> Eight  
o'clock, and as I creaked open the door to Akane's room, I  
>was pleased to note that both of them were still sleeping. Cool.  
<br>I slipped in on tiptoe, and drizzled the warm water onto her  
pig's  
>head.<br> Sure enough. It was him. Puny as life, and twice as ugly.  
The  
>Master. Happosai. I grabbed him by his collar, which, now that  
I<br>was looking closely at it, turned out to be a bra. Probably one  
of  
>Akane's, even. Why, that shameless little pervert!<br> "Okay,  
gramps. Jig's up. I've had it with you trying to pass  
>yourself off as P-chan, and now you're gonna pay!"<br> "You gotta  
hold onto me if you're gonna collect!" and he wormed  
>out of the brabandana, and hit the floor running.  
> Damn. I shoulda been holding him, rather than the bra. "Why <br>you

little...!" and I started after him.

> I didn't even get out the door, though, without being nailed.

<br>"Just WHAT do you think you're DOING in here?!" The textbooks

>Akane threw at me caught me completely off-balance, and knocked  
<br>me flat.

> "Akane, what the hell was that for?" I got up as quickly as I

<br>could. But not quick enough; she was right on top of me before I

>could stand up.<br> "You waltz in on me while I'm sleeping and in my  
pajamas, and you

>think you have the right to ask ME what I'M doing?"<br> "Dammit,

Akane, I haven't got time for this, okay? I'm trying to

>catch Happosai!"<br> "Oh, really? And what's that?" And she pointed  
to what had been

>`P-chan's' collar. Her bra. Which I was still holding.<br> Oh, shit.

Now I was in for it. She continued:

> "Happosai, nothing. You seem to do pretty well on your own. Now

<br>get OUT before I really get mad! And drop that bra, before I kill

>you!" Sure. Whatever you say. I dropped the sucker.<br> So she

didn't kill me. Instead, she just whacked me out her

>window. And unlike her father, she didn't bother to open it

first.<br>Stupid tomboy. If she'd just let me explain everything, for  
once...

> Still, I couldn't explain EVERYthing to her, anyway. Stupid

<br>warrior's code.

> Oh, well. Now that I was in the courtyard, I had to find the old

<br>pervert. Shouldn't be that hard; all I had to do was listen for  
some

>girls' screaming.<br> And from what I could tell, he wasn't too far  
off. In fact, it

>sounded like he was...<br> Oh, shit. He was in the dojo! And that

kids' class that was

>going on!<br> I scrambled to my feet, and tore over to the dojo. I  
could make

>out voices now, and a thump; the old man just sent Eichiro into  
the<br>wall. Kimae and Chibiko were shrieking, and Masanori was

yelling at

>him -- evidently, he had taking it upon himself to chase him now  
that<br>Eichiro was out of action.

> All at once, there was this familiar rumble. But it didn't sound

<br>quite like Mr. Tendo. Then the rumble turned into a roar. It  
was...

>HIROE'S voice!<br> "YOU SLIMY LITTLE PERVERT! GET YOUR HANDS \*OFF\*  
OF ME!!"

> I got to the dojo entrance in time to see as this sweet

little<br>twelve-year-old girl turned into a demon from hell.

Everyone else

>hit the floor, and even Happosai was startled enough by her

battle<br>aura to back up toward the door -- and into my hands. At  
that point,

>her demon-head shrank back, and she fell to her knees,  
obviously<br>exhausted.

> Mr. Tendo wasn't there yet, so I called over to Yoichi, who

was<br>closest to the equipment cabinet: "Yoichi-kun, could you get  
me some

>rope or something to tie this little creep up with?" He nodded

and<br>began rummaging furiously through the cabinet, and came up  
with some

>rope and some ribbon. "Thanks. Toss it here, will ya?"<br> I proceeded to tie Happosai up tightly. "You know, I'll bet you'd

>actually enjoy this if I was in my girl form, wouldn'tcha?" I snarled<br>quietly at him. Then I turned to Hiroe. "That was an incredible display, Hiroe-chan. I'll have to inform Mr. Tendo about it, and<br>I'll wager you'll be due for a advancement. You've certainly got

>the ki energy to be a fine martial artist someday." Even in her<br>fatigued state, she was beaming with pride. "Umm.. I'm really sorry

>about this, kids, but I'm gonna haveta leave for a while. I assume<br>Mr. Tendo's on his way, so he'll handle class..." I looked over at

>Eichiro "...and first aid."<br> Eichiro struggled to stand up. "I'll be okay," he said weakly.

> I smiled at his determination. "I'll take your word for it for<br>now, Eichiro-kun, but all the same, you'd better take it easy. Mr.

>Tendo calls this guy..." and I dangled Happosai in front of me,<br>"...the Master, so you've probably had a rough workout trying to

>fight him. I wouldn't push my luck if I were you." He nodded.<br>"Now, if you'll excuse me... could you guys just tell Mr. Tendo I

>had to take out the trash? I think he'll understand."<br> "Hai, Saotome-sensei!"

> "Good work, kids... and I'm sorry about the trouble he caused..."<br>

>\*\*\*<br>

> I went around to the back of the dojo, and knocked on the rear<br>door. Ryoga poked his head out, saw the two of us, nodded, and

>ducked back inside. There was a click, and he stepped outside,<br>holding the jar from the Neko-Hanten, and handed it to me.

> I opened the jar, and held it over Happosai's head. "Okay, you<br>little bugger.. I've got water from the Heshangniichuan right here."

> He was squirming to get out of my grip, but not so hard that he'd<br>spill the jar in my other hand. "Spring of Virtuous Man? You lie!

>Where could you have gotten that? I deliberately kicked you \*east\*.<br>AWAY from China. How could you have gotten to Jusenkyo?"

> "Let's just say that traveling with Ryoga have its advantages.<br>You get to see \*so many\* different places." The old coot went white.

>He hadn't thought of that before, but it made enough sense that he<br>bought the story, hook line and sinker. "Now, you realize what

>happens if you get this stuff on you, don'tcha?"<br> "B-b-but... I'd never be able to touch a girlie again! I'd dry up

>and wither away!"<br> "Yeah..." I grinned malevolently and leaned against the doorjamb.

>"You know, maybe I oughta call Pantyhose Tarou and let him come over<br>and watch. I could really get on his good side this way.. the enemy

>of my enemy is my friend and all that. Hey, it worked for Ryoga and<br>me, ne? And we never even had the decency to thank you for that,

>either..." I nodded to Ryoga, and he walked off to the corner of  
<br>the dojo. Now I reached over and made as if to pour the jar onto

>Happosai.<br> "NO! Please don't! Have mercy on a poor old man!" He  
did that

>puppy dog eyes thing that he always does when he's at a  
disadvantage.<br>I backed off with the jar, and held it just a little  
too close to

>his hands.<br> "Gramps, you should know better than that. Those  
Bambi-eyes are

>\*not\* gonna save you this time. You're no angel no matter how much  
<br>you try to look like one. So, I'm gonna turn you into one.. right

>now!" And I started to lift the jar over his head once more.<br> And  
that's when he burst his bonds and made a grab for it. "You  
>can't douse me if it's not there!" he shouted, and guzzled it  
down.<br> "No, you little pervert, no!" I yelled in apparent dismay,  
and

>dropped him to the floor.<br>

> Even after landing on his head -- I tried to twist him subtly  
<br>enough so that he would -- the old fart could move pretty well,

>and he tried to make a break for it. Fortunately, I knew which  
<br>direction he was gonna take:

> Toward Akane's room.<br> Which was why I had already sent Ryoga  
around that corner of

>the dojo. And no further, I should point out.<br> As the old codger  
rounded the corner, Ryoga stomped right on

>his head. Knocked him out cold. Sometimes, the old coot's pretty  
<br>easy to beat. All ya gotta do is to hit him when he ain't looking

>for it.<br> And it doesn't hurt that that was the old ghoul's truth  
serum

>he'd swilled, and not the Spring of Virtuous Man at all. He should  
<br>have been getting pretty groggy as it was, anyhow...

><br>\*\*\*

><br> "That thing still running, Ryoga-kun?" I asked, nodding toward

>the tape deck we had `borrowed' from Nabiki. Ryoga leaned over  
to<br>check the settings, and the tape he had started when I came by  
with

>the old coot.<br> "Mm-hm."

> "All right, you little pervert, you're gonna tell us what you  
did<br>and why you did it. Starting from the top, okay?"

> "Ah.. ah.. all right. You remember when I first arrived, and  
I<br>saw how Akane cuddled with that little pig every night, I  
decided

>to, ah.. `fill in' for her pig? You two punks wouldn't let me  
then,<br>but I found a way...

> "I found out about a spring in Jusenkyo called  
Heituenniichuan,<br>which would turn a person into a little black  
piglet..." I looked

>up at Ryoga. I motioned for him to switch off the recorder.<br>  
"Hold up, gramps. Do we want this on the record, Ryoga? I vowed

>that I wouldn't say anything about your curse, but Happosai here's  
<br>under no such compunction. If he says anything, that's how it  
goes."

> Ryoga squeezed his eyes together tightly, trying to decide.  
Then<br>he shook his head. "I can't do it. I can't tell her." He

turned  
>on the recorder. "Ask him what he did with the Heituenniichuan."<br>  
The old man obliged. "I travelled to Jusenkyo and got myself a  
  
>bottle of the stuff. And while I was at it, a barrel of  
Nyanniichuan<br>-- you never know when you'll need a girlie -- and a  
selection of  
>other springs. When I got back, I poured the Heituenniichuan  
onto<br>myself, and I turned into a near-twin of Akane's P-chan!  
> "Of course, I had to get rid of the real P-chan first, if I  
was<br>to take his place..." Ryoga shut off the machine as Happosai  
detailed  
>how he drizzled the Nanniichuan he'd gotten on P-chan's head --  
and<br>discovered, much to his surprise, that P-chan was none other  
than  
>Ryoga! What perfect luck! So, he had gotten himself into pig  
form,<br>and waited alongside the two kids, for Akane to discover  
that she  
>was in bed with a buck-naked Ryoga, and react accordingly. Then,  
in<br>the ensuing confusion, he'd simply slip in and take over.  
> "Okay, okay, we figured all that out already, gramps! What  
did<br>you do with the rest of the Nanniichuan?"  
> "The rest of-? Ranma, m'boy, what use do I have for  
Nanniichuan<br>water? I only had a small vial of the stuff, and I  
used it up on  
>Ryoga!"<br> Both of us fell over.  
><br> When we got up, Happosai was still there, still dazed from the  
  
>serum. Ryoga and I looked at each other, and then at him. It  
was<br>Ryoga who spoke first.  
> "Well, there's the verdict. Now, can we carry out the  
sentence?"<br>and he picked the old lech up as if to beat him to a  
pulp.  
> "Hold it! I got a better idea."<br> "You and your ideas. I'm just  
about up to here with `em."  
> "C'mon. I'll letcha beat up on her all ya want when I'm  
done,<br>okay?"  
> "...on \*her\*?" There was a long pause as Ryoga puzzled  
through<br>that one. "Oh! Sure!" We grabbed him, and charged into his  
  
>room.<br> "Here ya go, old man!" Plunk. Right into the barrel. "You  
  
>wantcher girlies, old man? Go fondle yerself! Take it away,  
<br>Ryoga!"  
> I left to go pick up the tape recorder that we'd left in the  
<br>practice room as Ryoga began to give `Happi-chan' the thrashing  
  
>of her life.<br>  
>\*\*\*<br>  
> Mr. Tendo and Akane just sat there, listening to the brief  
<br>recording Ryoga and I had made. Mr. Tendo's expression was one  
  
>of overwhelming gloom.<br> "What further indignities can he visit  
upon me and my children?  
>How many more prices must I pay?<br> Akane was on the verge of  
tears. "He... `got rid' of P-chan? You  
>mean that awful monster \*killed\* him?"<br> I put a hand on her  
shoulder. "Oh I doubt \*that\*, Akane. He's  
>not that kind of mean. I'll bet once he became a pig, he sent the  
<br>real P-chan off on some fool's errand. You know how easily that

>animal can get lost. I'm pretty sure P-chan's still alive and well..  
<br> She cut me off: "Ranma, P-chan isn't Ryoga..." I kept a straight

>face as best I could, as she turned thoughtful, "...but maybe he  
<br>could be, if he fell into that spring." She shrugged it off.  
"Heh.

>What're the odds, anyway?<br> "But then... where \*does\* Ryoga fit into all of this, Ranma?"

> I sighed heavily. That damn promise. All I could do was shrug.  
<br>"I really can't say, Akane. I guess Happosai was trying to frame

>him in order to cause a diversion."<br> "Well, it certainly worked, didn't it? Boy do I feel foolish."

>You'd feel even more foolish if you'd ever manage to put two  
and<br>two together about the `real' P-chan, I couldn't help thinking.

> "So, what're ya gonna do about Happosai, Mr. Tendo? I've got<br>Ryoga upstairs beatin' the crap outta her right now. A taste of

>his own medicine, y'might say, and Ryoga's havin' a ball too, I  
<br>might add. But I'll bet you'd like a piece of the old lech too,

>huh?"<br> Old man Tendo just sighed. "I don't know what I CAN do, Ranma.

>I owe a certain loyalty to my master. I can't simply go in there<br>and demolish him. Mostly, because he'd tear me to pieces first."

> "Hmph. Suit yerself. I dunno, I think you had a pretty good idea<br>awhile back when you tried to mail him to the North Pole. I know I

>stopped you and Pop that time, but the old coot's gone too far." I  
<br>stood up, and headed back to the old lech's room. "You know where

>I can get some packing tape?"<br> Kasumi must have been overhearing everything, because as I passed

>by the kitchen, she handed me an empty box, along with a roll of  
<br>tape. "Here you go, Ranma-kun. And I'd like that jar back when

>you're done with it, too. I still need to finish my canning." <br>

>\*\*\*<br>

> So, Ryoga and packed him away, and sent him parcel post, to the<br>Antarctic (Hey, I don't wanna run the risk of annoying Saint Nick

>either, ya know. Can't be too careful).<br> "So, Ryoga, what're ya gonna do now? I couldn't quite tell Akane

>the truth, ya know, so you may be off the hook. On the other hand,  
<br>ya can't be too careful..."

> "You're right, Ranma. As Ryoga, or even as Ryoga-chan, I still  
<br>can't even get close to Akane. But..." and he walked into Happosai's

>closet, and came out with the half-empty jar of Heitueniichuan. "At  
<br>least this way, I can be. And I can protect Akane from dangerous

>things... including the likes of you, Ranma."<br> And with that, he dumped the remaining contents of the Heitueniichuan

>onto his head, and P-chan sauntered off, supposedly to Akane's room.  
<br>I just stood there, speechless.

> Why, that little, no-good jerk! \*This\* is the thanks I get?!<br>

> ... Ahhh, what am I worried about? It'll take him two weeks to find  
<br>her bedroom. That oughta give me time to work on her myself. I  
turned  
>on my heel and walked off to her room.<br>  
>FIN.<br>  
>####<br>  
>Once again, thanks to the Jusenkyo Guide, and everyone else from the  
<br>FFML who wrote with their comments and compliments  
><br>I hope you've enjoyed the story. Let me know!  
><br>Itsu mo,  
>Ucchan ^\_<br>  
> <p><p>

End  
file.